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AUTHOR Parker, Franklin; Parker, Betty J.
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ABSTRACT

During his career, George Peabody financially supported educational endeavors and went beyond the accumulation of money to leave for one's children. His support began in the mid-1800s and his educational legacy remains. He established: (1) a $2 million Peabody Education Fund to promote public schools and teacher training in 12 civil war devastated southern states; (2) three museums of science; (3) the Baltimore Peabody Institute Library and Peabody Conservatory of Music, both now part of Johns Hopkins University; (4) six institute libraries with lecture halls that served adult education; and (5) low cost model housing in London for working people where about 19,000 people still live. George Peabody influenced individuals to support education, and his legacy serves as a reminder to others. (CK)

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By
Franklin and Betty J. Parker

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Franklin Parker
Education and Psychology
Western Carolina University
Cullowhee, NC28723

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"George Peabody's (1795-1869) Educational Legacy "
By Franklin and Betty J. Parker*

Why this interest in George Peabody's educational legacy?

We read his personal papers in Massachusetts, Maryland, London, and in depositories elsewhere; wrote a dissertation on him; and a book, George Peabody, A Biography (Vanderbilt University Press, 1971). With the 200th anniversary of his birth on February 18, 1995, we ask: What was his educational legacy ?

--A $2 million Peabody Education Fund (PEF) to promote public schools and teacher training in 12 Civil War-devastated southern states. (George Peabody College for Teachers of Vanderbilt University is the PEF legatee.)
--Three museums of science: Ethnology and Archaeology at Harvard, Natural Science at Yale, and Maritime History in Salem, Mass.
--The Baltimore Peabody Institute Library and Peabody Conservatory of Music, both now part of Johns Hopkins University.
--Six institute libraries whose lecture halls served adult education in Massachusetts, DC, and Vermont.
--Low-cost model housing in London for working people, unique for its time, where some 19,000 people still live. But first, Peabody's career.

Born poor in then Danvers, now Peabody, Mass. (18 miles from Boston), he had 4 short years of schooling. Apprenticed in a general store, he then worked in his older brother's drapery shop. He later went with an uncle to open a store in Georgetown, DC. Still in his teens, serving briefly in the War of 1812, he met fellow soldier and experienced merchant Elisha Riggs. A partnership in mercantile trade with the Riggs family began his commercial rise in Georgetown, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York. Ten buying trips to Europe followed, and over 30 years' residence in London as merchant-broker-banker, 1837-69. How did he make his money?

Maryland commissioned him to sell its $8 million bond issue in Europe for canals, railroads, and other internal improvements. Because of the Panic of 1837, Maryland and other states could not pay interest on their bonds. Convinced that the states would honor their obligations, Peabody

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bought many of these bonds cheaply and later profited. In 1843 his new firm, George Peabody and Co., dealt in American securities, western railroads, the Mexican War loan, and the Atlantic Cable Co. Young J. P. Morgan, son of Peabody's partner J. S. Morgan (partner after 1854), began his career as the New York representative of George Peabody and Co. George Peabody and Co. was thus the root of the House of Morgan. How did he become famous?

Some fame came when he lent American exhibitors funds to display American products at the 1851 Crystal Palace Great Exhibition. More fame came from his annual July Fourth dinners in London, also from 1851. He brought together English and American guests at a time when Britons generally disdained Americans. When did he begin his educational philanthropy?

In 1852, for his home town, Danvers', hundredth anniversary, which he could not attend, he sent a check and a sentiment: "Education--a debt due from present to future generations." Thus began the first of his six Peabody institutes (library and lecture hall and lecture fund plus, in Baltimore, an art gallery and music conservatory) and other educational gifts just mentioned. What was his motive in giving?

In a letter to a nephew whose schooling at Yale he paid for, he wrote:

> Deprived as I was of the opportunity of obtaining anything more than the most common education, I am well qualified to estimate its value by the disadvantages I labor under in the society which my business and situation in life frequently throws me, and willingly would I now give twenty times the expense attending a good education could I now possess it, but it is now too late for me....I can only do to those who come under my care, as I could have wished circumstances had permitted others to have done by me.

Why was the PEF, 2 years after the Civil War, so important?

Lincoln was shot in 1865. Radical Reconstructionists won the November 1866 election. Northern sentiment to punish the South was unbridled, further deepening southern resentment. Sectional rivalry seethed. Southern white illiteracy had increased because of the war. Blacks were almost totally illiterate. Southern property was half its pre-war value. Peabody's $2 million PEF to promote public schools and teacher training in the South was a small symbolic act of reconciliation. How was that $2 million spent?

The challenge was to use wisely this small amount to meet somehow an overwhelming need. Matching self help and permanent tax support was the policy set by the PEF's first agent Barnas

Sears. Successor to Horace Mann as Massachusetts school board secretary, Sears left the Brown University presidency for the PEF. PEF aid went to southern town schools where many students could be gathered and where the schools could serve as models. Aid increased as enrollments rose. Local authorities had to raise two or three times the PEF grant. Taxes had to be voted to perpetuate schools as public institutions under state authority. Where local officials were found to be dedicated to public education, Sears made them subagents authorized to spend PEF money. What were the greatest obstacles?

The southern attitude was that education is a private, family concern. Southerners preferred private schools. Public schools were looked on as charity schools. Impoverished people would rather keep their children at home than be stigmatized as poor. Sears also had to overcome public reluctance to pay taxes for other people's children. He had to deal with state-segregated schools and some mixed schools in South Carolina and Louisiana. What was his policy about black schools?

Black schools received two-thirds the amount given white schools. Rightly or wrongly, Sears's reasons were that from 1865 the federal Freedmen's Bureau and northern missionary teachers had aided exclusively black schools, that he initially found more and better black schools than schools for poor white children, and that black schools cost less to maintain. How successful was Sears in promoting public schools?

By his death in 1880, after 13 years as PEF agent, Sears said that in the 12 southern states served by the PEF, public schools had taken hold. It was time to promote normal schools and teacher institutes. This effort fell largely on second agent J. L. M. Curry, an Alabamian who had served in both the U.S. and Confederate congresses. Curry, like Sears, was an impassioned speaker for and promoter of public education, normal schools, and month-long summer teacher institutes. How did the PEF promote normal schools?

By scholarships to students on condition that they teach for two years. In 1867 when the PEF began, only one of the 21 state-supported normal schools in the U.S. was in the South. In 1872, 6 out of 42 were in the South. From 1875, the PEF consistently aided the normal school in Nashville. Before Sears's death in 1880 he and the trustees favored making the Nashville Normal School a model for the South and the PEF's main legatee. When did the PEF cease operations?

Peabody's founding letter told the trustees that they could end the fund after 30 years. In the 1890s the trustees decided to give the fund's major assets to the Nashville Normal School, soon called the Peabody Normal College, and after 1909, George Peabody College for Teachers. On the PEF's liquidation in 1914, $1.5 million went to George Peabody College for Teachers, $350,000 to

the Slater Fund for Negro Education, and over $450,000 to southern universities for teacher education. How much money did the PEF spend in the South?

From George Peabody's $2 million principal plus interest, the trustees distributed $3.6 million to stimulate public education and teacher training in the southern states. What have historians said about the PEF's influence?

University of North Carolina Education Professor Edgar W. Knight wrote: "The Peabody Fund...was not only the earliest manifestation of a spirit of reconciliation on the part of the Northern man toward the southern states, but it was also one of the largest educational blessings which ever came from the outside to that section of the country."

William Torrey Harris, as quoted by J. L. M. Curry: "The administration of the Peabody Fund and the fruitful results that have followed it could not be surpassed in the history of endowments." What about PEF critics?

Writing from today's vantage point after a hard-fought century-long civil rights struggle, historian Kenneth R. Johnson faulted the PEF's acceptance of segregated schools and its discrimination in giving black schools only two-thirds the amount given to white schools. Sears, knowing that some would criticize his discrimination, said: let the people settle the question of separate schools. Sears had to work within state school segregation laws and work with prejudiced southern leaders. Despite this controversy, how important was the PEF?

The common problem was to educate the southern poor, white and black; to gain acceptance of tax-supported public schools; and to advance teacher institutes and teacher training normal schools. The PEF was the first to do this work, first multi-million dollar foundation in the U.S. with a positive attitude toward preventable social ills; first without religious conditions; first whose scope was national rather than local; first to provide modifications as conditions changed; first to require matching funds so that small help could do much good; and first to require legal state responsibility toward permanent solutions of pervasive civic problems. The PEF was first to set principles and precedents adopted by later foundations. On the PEF rested all subsequent philanthropic efforts in the South. How did the PEF's main legatee develop: George Peabody College for Teachers in Nashville?

The Tennessee legislature in 1875 amended the University of Nashville's charter to replace its literary department with the Normal School. The Normal School opened December 1, 1875, with 13 students and 3 faculty. Its lineage was Davidson Academy, 1785-1806; re-chartered as Cumberland College, 1806-26; re-chartered as the University of Nashville, 1826-75 (3 miles east of

the Vanderbilt University campus); re-chartered as George Peabody College for Teachers (moved adjacent to Vanderbilt), 1909-79; and since July l, 1979, as George Peabody College for Teachers of Vanderbilt University. What about the Peabody-Vanderbilt merger?

The institution chartered in Nashville on August 6, 1872, as "Central University of the Methodist Episcopal Church South" was renamed Vanderbilt University on June 6, 1873, after Cornelius Vanderbilt's $l million gift (some sources say he was influenced by Peabody's example). Classes began at Vanderbilt October 3, 1875. From 1899 Vanderbilt Chancellor James H. Kirkland wanted a Vanderbilt-Peabody affiliation to make Nashville the South's leading university city. He unsuccessfully wooed with land offers and other enticement PEF trustees Daniel C. Gilman (Johns Hopkins University president), James D. Porter (former Tennessee governor and president of both the University of Nashville and Peabody Normal College), and George Peabody College for Teachers first President, Bruce R. Payne. After Peabody College moved in 1914 next to but not on Vanderbilt property, Peabody and Vanderbilt cooperated in courses and students, in shared libraries, and in other joint programs . What led to merger?

Higher education, particularly colleges of education, was hit hard in the 1970s: by declining college-age population, falling enrollments, inflation, and rising energy and other costs. As enrollment declined, Peabody economized with reduced programs and faculty and sold its Demonstration School. But to survive, Peabody's president thought Peabody needed an affiliation. Peabody leaders preferred Vanderbilt but also considered a Peabody-Tennessee State University connection and a possible merger outside of Nashville. After extensive negotiation, on July 1, 1979, Peabody College became Vanderbilt University's ninth school. Who won? Who lost?

Both gained. In view of Peabody's century-long history and independence in teacher education, Peabody faculty, staff, and alumni were saddened. Peabody faculty positions were lost. But Peabody has progressed in the years since merger with rising enrollment, faculty achievement in research grants and in national teacher education leadership, and in producing outstanding graduates. Among Peabody College's 29,000 alumni are more than 30 college and university presidents, 175 school system superintendents, and teachers in more than 10,000 classrooms. What about the Peabody Institute of Baltimore?

Peabody lived and prospered in Baltimore for 22 years, 1815-37. From 1854, he urged prominent Baltimoreans visiting London to help him plan an institute there. The plan for a library, art gallery, music academy, and lectures--coordinated by the Maryland Historical Society (MHS) trustees (with their offices in the institute)--came from John Pendleton Kennedy, Baltimore lawyer, novelist, U.S. Congressman, and U.S. Secretary of the Navy. What problems arose?

Between Peabody's February 9, 1857, founding letter and the October 25, 1866, dedication, the trustees were divided over the Civil War and over management between the PIB and MHS trustees. On his U.S. visit for the 1866 dedication, he brought together trustees who had not spoken to each other for years because of the Civil War. Blaming himself for administrative difficulties, he asked the MHS to withdraw and compensated them with a $20,000 publication fund gift. How did the library work out?

The Peabody Institute Library under first Provost Nathaniel Holmes Morison was Baltimore's leading research library. In its new building from 1878, its six-level wrought iron stacks overlooked the reading room like a cathedral. Architecturally it was one of the most striking libraries in North America. Even the Library of Congress did not own fifteen percent of its unique research collection. PIB Library has served researchers from all over the world. For two decades, until the Johns Hopkins University developed its own library, its faculty used the PIB Library. How did the PIB Library influence Enoch Pratt"?

Businessman Enoch Pratt, a PIB trustee and treasurer, was by that experience influenced to found the Enoch Pratt Free Library. In turn in this century, for 17 years, 1965-82, when PIB Library funds were insufficient, it was supported by the city as part of the Enoch Pratt Free Library. Since 1982 it continues as the George Peabody Collection of the Johns Hopkins University Libraries. What happened to the art gallery?

The PIB Art Gallery from 1880 was Baltimore's first public art museum. Other components of the PIB grew and space was needed. With the founding of Baltimore's Museum of Art and the Walters Art Gallery, much of the PIB Art Gallery was variously distributed and/or sold. Some masterpieces by Maryland's great neoclassical sculptor William Henry Rinehart remain at the PIB. What of the Music Academy?

The renamed Peabody Conservatory of Music ranks among America's most important schools of music. It functioned before and was a model for the best in American music education: Juilliard in New York (1905) and the Berklee School of Music in Boston (1945). Since 1894 the Peabody Conservatory has had a Preparatory School, world-renowned as a special school for musically talented children. In 1977 the Peabody Conservatory became part of the Johns Hopkins University. What was Peabody's contribution to science?

Peabody, who paid for the education of his nieces and nephews, helped one nephew, O. C. Marsh, become the first U.S. professor of paleontology at Yale (and the second in the world).

Nephew Marsh induced his uncle to give $150,000 each for science museums to Harvard (archaeology and ethnology) and Yale (natural science), and $140,000 to Salem for a museum of maritime history. Peabody's three museums of science were crucial gifts made when the classics still dominated higher education and science was fighting for acceptance in the curriculum. What is Peabody's educational legacy 200 years after his birth?

We described the PEF as America's first significant precedent-setting educational foundation; Peabody libraries and lectures for adult education well before the Andrew Carnegie public library era; Peabody's direct influence on Johns Hopkins to found Johns Hopkins University, Hospital, and Medical School; and on Enoch Pratt to endow the Enoch Pratt Free Library of Baltimore; privately funded low-cost model housing for low-income working families; and other influences. What does his legacy mean today?

Peabody made less money than and gave before the age of the robber barons; before foundations were established for tax advantage. It is natural to accumulate money and to leave estates to one's children. Peabody went beyond this normal goal in his 1852 sentiment, "Education, a debt due from present to future generations." Jonathan Edwards said to his generation: "We are like a city set on a hill." George Peabody said for his times and perhaps for ours: "I can only do to those who come under my care, as I could have wished circumstances had permitted others to have done by me." His legacy reminds us to share one another's burden.